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ABSTRACT

This report examines family and community experiences in transition from school to post-school life for students receiving special education services. It presents the vision of transition planning in Texas, the state of practice as reflected in a study of 27 students, and conclusions and recommendations. The transition planning vision calls for planning at the state, regional/local, and individual levels to enable all people to choose where to live, work, and play; to make informed choices and have control over their lives; to participate in their community; and to be responsive to change. The study assessed awareness of transition planning and the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), school staff training, parental involvement, community-based educational training/work sites, program organization and resource allocation, ITP meetings and participants, transition planning outcome goals, relationships with agencies, barriers to effective planning, and value of transition planning. Recommendations call for: student, parent, and school staff training; greater involvement of students in transition planning; development of strategies to compensate for lack of parental involvement; greater attention to recreation and leisure activities; increased emphasis on development of social networks; moving from paper compliance to outcome-based planning; allocation of school funding to support transition planning and services; and need for schools to build connections with local communities and develop an array of options for community participation. (JDD)

ED 368 113

OVERVIEW

CASE STUDIES OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES IN TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL LIFE FOR STUDENTS RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

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OVERVIEW

Case Studies of Family and Community Experiences in Transition from School to Post-School Life for Students Receiving Special Education Services

The purpose of this overview is to provide the reader with an impression of the transition planning process.

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OVERVIEW

School to Post-School Transition Planning: Practices, Conclusions and Recommendations

The case study of family and community experiences in transition from school to post-school life for students receiving special education services was conducted in April-May, 1992. Six school districts volunteered to participate in the study which surveyed 27 students. The districts varied in their geographic location, urban-suburban-rural characteristics, size, and composition of the student population enrolled in special education. The students included in the study varied in their ethnic background, age, disability, and level of disability.

1. Transition Planning in Texas: The Vision

In response to the mandate of the 71st Texas Legislature, six state agencies developed and adopted an Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Transition Planning. This memorandum provided a direction for the implementation of a transition planning process in the state and assured compliance with Senate Bill 417 §3.05. However, compliance with the MOU is limited by existing resources and services of the participating state agencies. The six agencies include the Texas Commission for the Blind, the Texas Department of Human Services, the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Employment Commission, and the Texas Rehabilitation Commission.

The development of the vision for transition planning is based on a mission statement and principles adopted for the "Comprehensive Plan for Community Integrated Employment and Independent Living for Texans with Disabilities." The intent was to establish a dynamic process that contributes to the development of a human service system that offers all persons with disabilities choices and opportunities, in a comprehensive array of coordinated services to achieve maximum independence and integration in the community. The following principles provide the direction for actualizing the mission:

- All people have the opportunity to choose where to live, work, and play.
- People should have opportunities to make informed choices and have control over their lives.
- Every person should have opportunities to access and participate in their community.
- People will continue to be influenced by and should be responsive to change.

In reference to planning for the transition from public schools to adult life, two additional principles were endorsed in the MOU on Transition Planning: to empower students to successfully plan for their future by equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for integration in the community and to make effective use of personal and public resources in achieving independence.

To make transition planning successful for every student, transition planning must occur on three levels:

- **State Level**: This level includes the negotiation of the MOU on Transition Planning and its revisions. The agencies involved recognize the need for long-term systems change while acknowledging the limita-

tions of the current capabilities of all agencies involved. Therefore, the vision acknowledges the current situation by establishing a minimum for collaborative participation in the provision of transition services while encouraging the maximum participation possible.

- **Regional/Local Level**: In order to assure compliance with the law and to establish an effective process for implementation, participation by the adult service agencies includes:

  - Local collaborative meetings of educators, participating agencies, people with disabilities, parents or other family members, community organizations, representatives from consumer and advocacy organizations, and business and community leaders.

  - Provision of (print) information.

  - Attendance at ITP meetings. Attendance is affected by local planning, adequate notice, and cooperative planning. The objective is to develop a plan for agency involvement in transition, including local review of students' profiles to allow agencies access to information to determine appropriate involvement.

Successful individual transition planning is not predicated on the presence of agency representatives at all ITP meetings.

- **Individual Transition Planning** focuses on the student's vision for his/her future. It is intended to be a student driven, collaborative, long-range, outcome-oriented process. The results include student empowerment and inclusion in the community. Because of its long-range orientation and focus on individual student interests and preferences, the individual transition plan (ITP) is a separate document from the individual education plan (IEP) which serves as an annual blueprint for the student's instructional objectives to be attained through the school curriculum and related services. One objective of the ITP is to use the student's desires to identify intended outcomes. Based on the outcomes, the ITP identifies supports in the student's life such as family, friends, coworkers as well as agency services, preferably from among community resources available to the general public, with participating agencies providing the necessary assistance to effect their use. Finally, timelines for the initiation of support services are to be specified in the ITP.

ITP meeting participants are determined annually, based on the student's plans for the future and not based solely on the disabling condition(s) of the student. Planning must begin at age 16 but may be started earlier for younger students whose needs require early collaboration.

2. Study Findings: The State of Practice

Transition Planning as a Turning Point: The transition planning process represents a turning point for parents and school staff because it requires a reversal of the traditional special education planning model for services. Contrary to the special education mode of planning for services which promotes parents' dependence on the school and the school taking the major responsibility in planning for the student's program, transition planning promotes increased independence, initiative, and responsibility taking of students and their parents. Transition planning involves the transference of responsibility from the school to the student and their parents. In this sense, the process is not only a transition for the student, it is also a transition for the parent.

Transition planning is considered a turning point because the better the services that the school provides, the more difficult the transition of responsibilities to the parent. As stated by one of the special education staff interviewed in the study: "I think that we have done everything for the students in special education. We have taken the child away from the parents at age three and done everything, and told them everything. We are the experts... I am so happy to see the ITP come because at age 16 we can give the student back to the

graduate they are not on their own. They need to know that there can be a continuation; that it is a transition, not a floundering in the waters. It is more of a move from one place to the other."

Awareness of Transition Planning and the ITP: For the schools in this study, there is great confusion between ITPs and IEPs and between transition planning and Admission, Review and Dismissal meetings (ARDs), regardless of the district's or school's ITP practices. This confusion extends to parents, students, regular education teachers, and to some of the special education teachers. Even those who were familiar with transition planning and the ITP kept referring to the process as ARD. Contributing to the confusion are the following:

- Many schools schedule the ITP meeting jointly with the ARD meeting.
- The IEP (ARD) overshadows the ITP because of its longer existence.
- The requirement in the MOU on Transition Planning that those components of the ITP that are the responsibility of the school be incorporated into the IEP and the recent passage of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that requires a statement of needed transition services be included in the student's IEP.

School Staff Training: The type and level of staff training varied greatly across schools, even among schools in the same district. In some schools staff received no training. Major staff training sources identified included:

- State special education and vocational education conferences
- Regional education service centers
- District special education staff
- Social service agency representatives
- School special education director
- School transition coordinator

Training and Education of Parents in Transition Planning: One of the six school districts in the study has a comprehensive parent training and education program. Parents who participated in these activities are more knowledgeable about transition planning. This program includes, in addition to the training workshop, the involvement of parents in a number of pre-ITP meeting activities. These activities include:

- **Parent Training**: Training sessions entitled "futures planning" are periodically offered on Saturdays. The sessions involve the development of an ITP by each participating parent.
- **Parent Information Session**: The transition planning process, its objectives, who is involved, and the steps in the process are explained to the parents by the vocational adjustment coordinator (VAC) in individual meetings.
- **Needs Assessment** whereby questionnaires are administered both to the student and the parents, prior to the ITP meeting, regarding interests, needs, and future plans.
- **Review with Parents**: The data obtained from the needs assessment are reviewed with the parents before the ITP meeting.
- **Community Participation**: Parents are asked to invite to the ITP meeting other individuals who have been prominent in the student's life. These may include family members, friends, neighbors, church members, employers, or siblings.

Parental Involvement: The parent has been recognized, by district and school staff, as the key element in transition planning. Without the parent assuming the responsibilities of an advocate, the chances of student success after high school are significantly diminished. According to both parents and school staff: "without the parent being there and aware of what is going on, the planning is not going to happen for that student, and that student is going to end up sitting at home."

Parent involvement, a key element in transition planning, is low in many of the schools, according to school personnel. Schools recognize the need to increase parental involvement but think they may not have the resources or have not developed the strategies to do so. Strategies to increase parental

parent. We are going to wean ourselves off of this total responsibility and the parents are going to have to carry this ball...."

Transition planning helps the parents, because the parents are, according to school personnel, "inexperienced in performing these tasks." Consequently, one objective of transition planning is "to break that cycle. We need to break it early and give the responsibility back to where it belongs."

State of Practice: Transition planning practices varied across school districts, across schools within a district, and across students. While district, school and staff procedures assured a certain level and quality of practice, the critical role of parents and students in the process made the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of transition planning vary from student to student. The transition planning process observed in the districts and schools involved in the study is oriented, in large part, to vocational education and training. School districts and individual schools can be classified into two groups in relation to their implementation/practice status.

Process Oriented: The process oriented schools are still getting familiar with the transition planning process. Their objective is to get comfortable with and master the process, i.e., developing ITPs for the students and convening ITP meetings. In this group of schools, staff organization in relation to the process has not been completed. Key duties and responsibilities associated with transition planning were regarded as part-time and added-on to full time teaching duties. Consequently, personnel involved in the process had not yet mastered the different steps:

- They were not fully familiar with the information needed;
- They were overwhelmed or were greatly burdened by the paperwork and the terminology;
- They developed ITPs late in the school year;
- They developed all ITPs in a short period of time to meet school deadlines;
- They had large information gaps with regard to the community and agency components of the process.

Outcome Oriented: The outcome oriented schools have generally mastered the transition planning process and are putting emphasis, to different degrees, on providing vocational education and training.

The transition planning process observed in the districts and schools involved in the study is oriented, in large part, to vocational education and training. We identified three groups of schools based on the scope of their vocational education and training programs:

- **Classroom and Campus-Based**: These schools recognize the importance of vocational training in preparing students for transition from high school. However, their current vocational component is based on vocational education (employment skills) and the development of campus-based training positions.
- **Limited Community-Based Educational Training/Work Sites**: These schools recognize the need for community-based vocational education training and have started to develop several community-based educational training/work sites. The sites developed are not diversified and tend to fall into traditional special education training positions (e.g., food service, janitorial).
- **Diversified Community-Based Educational Training/Work Sites**: These schools have a comprehensive vocational education training program that includes employment and survival skills education and training, preparatory on-campus sites, and a diversified portfolio of community-based sites.

The state-of-ITP-practice was summarized by one of the teachers as follows: "I don't feel that we have grasped the spirit of the ITP. I think we have got the mechanics of it but not the spirit of it. The spirit of it is to make it useful for the student. It has got to be something that makes the student and the family aware of options and how to achieve these options. They need to realize that when they

involvement identified as effective, by staff and parents, include:

- Use of Pro-Active Strategies: "We make them get involved. I know most of the parents. If parents don't speak English, we have someone at the meeting who can speak Spanish. If they don't have transportation, we will arrange for transportation. If parents don't come to the meeting, I will go on a home visit and make them understand."

- Parent Involvement Program: The program, developed by one of the districts, has several components:

  - Convenient Scheduling: Scheduling of meetings with parents was based on a parent survey regarding time and location preferences. As a result of the survey, meetings have been scheduled twice a month during hours convenient to the parents, and a babysitting service was provided.

  - Bringing in agency representatives to speak to parents about different services.

  - Preparation of a transition tape for parents to demonstrate what students enrolled in special education can accomplish and their opportunities. The tape describes the transition process, shows the older students working and has interviews with employers.

  - Formation of a parent support group.

  - Periodic parent-staff meetings regarding transition planning issues.

  - Establishment of a district wide Transition Planning Steering Committee which includes a parent representative, transition coordinators, agency representatives, and representatives from the business community. The committee meets monthly and reviews ITP practices, cases and procedures.

  - Home visits by the transition coordinator to meet with parents, review the transition process, go over a transition folder and show a video of students enrolled in special education performing on actual community-based educational training/work sites.

  - Inviting the parent to visit educational training/work sites and see the student in his/her environment. A transition coordinator who states that the "community is her classroom" schedules meetings with parents at the community-based educational training/work site(s).

  - Parental access to the transition coordinator at all times.

Implementation Models: Transition planning has been implemented in different ways. Two implementation models were observed in the districts:

(1) Full implementation involving all students enrolled in special education 16 years old or older.

(2) Sequential implementation by disability category. This model initially implemented transition planning with the largest disability group, followed by other disability groups. Sequential implementation was chosen to accommodate resource limitations and address low parental involvement.

The Recruitment of Community-Based Educational Training/Work Sites: School staff, parents and employers regard community-based vocational education training as the most critical element in the transition process. Transition, according to them, can not be successful without realistic vocational education training and community-based work experience. The development of a diversified portfolio of educational training/work sites is regarded as fundamental. The success in developing such a portfolio is based, almost exclusively, on the personality, creativity, initiative, and persistence of the transition coordinator. As transition coordinators have multiple responsibilities, their perception of the importance of the development of community-based educational training/work sites (relative to their other duties) will dictate the amount of time and energy they will allocate to this task. Consequently, a school district's success

in developing a community-based educational training/work site depends on the effectiveness of the VAC or transition coordinator.

School staff utilized a variety of methods to recruit community-based educational training/work sites.

- Demographic and economic analysis of the community to identify industries with good potential for student training, in order to ensure that students can find jobs.

- Neighborhood analyses: driving through the neighborhoods where the students live and making a list of all the businesses in the neighborhood.

- Continuous inventorying of employment sites to establish a diverse portfolio of community-based educational training/work sites.

- The involvement of parents, staff and students to identify potential educational training/work sites in the community.

- The personal touch: Direct educational training/work site recruitment by the transition coordinator. "I love it when they tell me no, because I tell them that they will be hiring. I talk my way in..."

- Establishment of a community-wide educational training/work site program which includes a cross section of the local businesses and industries (i.e., hospital, food service, retail store, print shop, food processing plant, etc.). Each educational training/work site has several positions. Students involved in the program rotate among the different sites every six weeks, or sooner if a student masters the task/job at a particular training/job site. Several students work at each site and are supervised by one job coach per site.

- Recruitment by employers through a videotape showing the school's students in different educational training/work environments. The videotape "relieves a lot of fear and concern on the part of prospective employers. You don't know what kinds of pictures some people have in their minds when you tell them that your students have severe-profound disabilities."

- Simulation of promising educational training/work sites, so that students who are lower functioning can train in a simulated environment.

To maintain educational training/work sites, school staff recognized the need to provide continuous support to employers to build and enhance employer trust and commitment. "We have got to get employers interested in our kids on a personal level. When they do, we provide the support, we have to provide the training, we have to be there. We gain their trust by letting them know that we did not just sell-talk but that we really do mean it. Once you gain their trust and respect, there is no limit."

Transition Planning Program Organization and Resource Allocation: Transition planning programs are organized and managed on a school departmental level (i.e., special education department) rather than a campus or district level. Some of the programs visited recognized the need to reorganize in order to have access to greater resources as well as be able to allocate resources more efficiently. Two program re-organization models have emerged. One program organization model reallocates resources through cooperation and partnership between special education and vocational education in the school. The second program organization model allocates resources at the district level.

Program Reorganization: Access to Greater Resources Through Partnership. In small communities where employment opportunities are limited, special education community-based vocational education training programs compete with the educational training programs set up by the vocational education department. To avoid competition and utilize resources more efficiently across school departments, the school set up a vocational education training partnership between the special education department and the vocational education department. To reinforce the partnership, the district created a new position which is half special education and half vocational education.

Program Reorganization: District-Based Resource Allocation: In this study, one of the

school districts is redistributing its resources on a district rather than a campus basis in order to use resources more efficiently. The school district uses this model since it is a single employment market. The program is headed by a transition services coordinator (a district-wide position) whose main responsibility is developing educational training/work sites in the community. The transition services coordinator is supported by a team of full-time paraprofessionals and job coaches (rather than teachers acting as job coaches). The transition services coordinator works with classroom teachers in developing the students' necessary survival and job skills.

ITP Meetings: The MOU on Transition Planning states that: "To minimize the need for separate meetings, the district may schedule the development and annual review of the individual transition plan (ITP) in conjunction with the admission, review, and dismissal committee's development and review of the individual education plan (IEP)." Because ITP development requires input from multiple individuals and organizations, the scheduling of ITP meetings is complicated. Three models for scheduling ITP meetings have emerged. The models were not associated with differences in the comprehensiveness or effectiveness of the ITPs. The models are listed in order of their frequency of use.

(1) **Joint ITP-ARD Meeting**: This scheduling pattern is more common in larger schools with large populations of students in special education. Joint ITP-ARD meetings make scheduling more efficient, since both meetings involve coordination with multiple individuals and most of the individuals involved in the ARD meeting are also part of the ITP meeting. A joint meeting format, according to school personnel, also encourages agency participation. Agency staff who attend IEP meetings tend to arrive early for the ITP meeting if it takes place first, or stay for it, if it follows the ARD meeting. Generally, the ITP meeting precedes the ARD meeting. Joint ITP-ARD scheduling contributes to lack of distinction between the two processes and to the diminution of the importance of the ITP, according to school staff: "I get the impression that they regard the ITP as a formality. They see the ARD as the main meeting."

(2) **Exclusive ITP Meeting**: Several of the schools allocate a separate meeting for the ITP because special education administrators perceive transition planning as a distinct process. Parental and staff awareness of the ITP in these schools tends to be greater.

(3) **Mixed Model**: In one of the schools, the transition coordinator has the discretion to schedule joint ITP-ARD meetings or exclusive ITP meetings on the basis of a student's needs. The coordinator schedules separate ITP meetings for seniors and joint ITP-ARD meetings for students in the lower grades.

ITP Meeting Participants: The MOU on Transition Planning states that: "Transition planning should always include the student and parent/guardian and to the extent appropriate, general education, special education, and vocational education personnel and representatives of participating agencies."

The case studies showed that the ITP meeting involves a diverse group of individuals and organizations.

- **Parent Participation**: School personnel perceived parental participation in ITP meetings as low. Low parental participation, or lack of it, is attributed by school personnel and parents to:
  - Scheduling: As ITP meetings take place during school hours, parents who work may not be able to take time off from work to attend a meeting.
  - Lack of transportation.
  - Language barriers: Parents who do not speak English may feel uncomfortable in a meeting handled in English even when a translator is present.
  - Low involvement in student's education as a whole.
  - Lack of recognition of the importance of the ITP meeting due to little or no effort on part of the school to inform the parent.

- Lack of initiative on the school's part to inform parents, accommodate their schedules and eliminate barriers to meeting attendance.

In some of the schools where parent attendance is low, ITP meetings will not take place if the parents can not attend. Instead, meetings are rescheduled to meet parents' availability.

- **Student Participation**: Students are present at their ITP meetings unless the student is unable to communicate or the student's behavior at the meeting may be disruptive to the meeting. Schools varied in their effort to prepare students for the meeting and to elicit their likes, dislikes, preferences and wishes for the future.

- **Teacher and Counselor Participation**: Usually, the ITP meeting is attended by special education teaching and counseling staff. Also present are either the VAC, transition coordinator or a vocational education teacher. Regular education teachers are generally not present, although in some schools the transition coordinator interviews them about the student prior to the meeting.

- **Administration Participation**: Participation of administrative staff varies. In most schools, according to school personnel, the school administration is aware of the meetings but does not take an active part in them.

- **Participation of Other Individuals Significant in the Student's Life**: Only one school district actively asks parents to invite to the ITP meeting other individuals, who are significant in the life of the student, to act as advocates and supporters.

- **Employer/Supervisor Participation**: In this study, none of the schools actively invite employers or employment supervisors to ITP meetings.

- **Service Agency Participation**: Study participants widely acknowledged lack of participation by state agency representatives in ITP meetings. Most schools invite agency representatives to all ITP meetings. Agency representatives, in most of the districts studied, only attend ITP meetings of students about to graduate from high school.

Key Players in Transition Planning: In the transition planning process, the quality of implementation and overall effectiveness of the plan depend, to a significant extent, on several key individuals. The key individuals in the planning process are the student, parent, and the transition coordinator or vocational adjustment coordinator.

- **The Student**: Transition planning is intended to be student driven; it is a plan developed with the student. In order for the plan to be effective, the student, in the opinion of educators, counselors and parents "has to buy into the plan." The student tends to do so if he/she can identify or agree with the objectives specified in the plan. Helping the student articulate his/her likes, interests, and objectives may be a time consuming process. Consequently, in some of the schools included in the study, student input is obtained through the administration of a pre-meeting questionnaire or interview. The transition coordinator interviews the student and his/her parents, asks for input from the student's teachers, counselor(s), and classmates. Some of the teachers discuss occupational choices with their class on a daily basis. Obtaining student input prior to the meeting prevents situations where the student feels uncomfortable or reluctant to communicate in front of a group of people. Regardless of the method of obtaining student input, both educators and parents agreed that if the ITP does not represent the student's interests and capabilities, its successful implementation will be in jeopardy.

- **The Parent**: The parent has a critical role in all aspects of the student's education and overall quality of life. According to school staff, it appears that parents who were involved in their child's education, who were familiar with district and community resources, and who believed in their child created a success oriented environment for their child. This involvement held true regardless of the level of severity of the disabling condition of the child, the overall quality of services which the school provided or the obstacles encountered by the parent. Parents, who chose a passive or invisible role in the process, significantly detracted from their child's chances to lead a productive life regardless of the quality of the school's programs or the community's resources.

The role of the parent as advocate was defined by one of the parents, as follows: "Parents must learn the skill to function as a transition specialist themselves, an employment specialist and learn the advocacy process." "Having a child with a disability is more difficult because there is never, ever any point that you can sit back and relax. You have to be on top of it all the time, all through school. You have to know what your child needs, and access it, and demand it. When they get out of school it doesn't stop, because you have to be the liaison between them and all of the various agencies."

- **The Transition Coordinator/Vocational Adjustment Coordinator**: The transition coordinator or the vocational adjustment coordinator plays a key role in the effective implementation of transition planning and in the development of an outcome orientation of the transition planning program. The transition coordinator influences the transition program with his/her personality. This individual is instrumental to the process by:

  - Setting up the transition planning program at school
  - Providing staff and parental training
  - Developing community-based educational training/work sites

  Generally, transition coordinators who are knowledgeable about transition planning are able to organize better and more effective programs, ensure greater commitment on part of staff and parents to the process, and involve the business community through the creation of educational training/work sites. The most effective transition coordinators exhibit a high level of initiative, have limitless energy, and are creative, regardless of school or community resources.

Transition Planning Outcome Goals: The MOU on Transition Planning stated that "the individual transition plan will focus on those considerations which will have the most impact on the successful independence in the community for the student with disabilities. An individual transition plan for each student 16 years of age or above who is enrolled in special education will address ... anticipated outcomes in the following areas: employment; education; independent living; recreation, social, and leisure; and general considerations."

A review of students' ITPs in relation to these outcome goals demonstrated the following:

- **Employment**: Most emphasis is given to post high school employment. The transition planning programs in the schools studied are largely oriented to vocational education and training. The objective of school vocational training programs is to facilitate competitive employment, with or without support.

- **Education**: The ITP plans reviewed identify a range of post secondary educational goals for students enrolled in special education programs. Educational goals specified include: community college programs, vocational training, adult and continuing education, and academic instruction.

- **Independent Living Outcomes**: According to both the ITPs reviewed and data obtained from interviews, independent living options are commonly discussed in ITP meetings. The issues discussed deal with housing, support services, and transportation. The discussion of this topic, according to both school staff and parents, is characterized by staff emphasis of the need for parents to consider available options and accept the idea that their child should live independently. The perception most frequently held by school staff is that students who live with their parents, after leaving high school, fare less well than students who live outside their family home. Parents usually regard independent living as a long-term option and not as an immediate postschool outcome. "Letting go" of the child is difficult for most parents, according to both school staff and parents. To assist parents, some schools provide parents with lists of group homes in the community. Some school staff go with parents to visit group homes or other living facilities in the community.

- **Recreation, Social, and Leisure Options**: Generally, public recreation facilities are identified in the student's ITP with the anticipation that the student's family will involve the student in any recreational, social or leisure activities in which they themselves participate.

Relationship with Agencies: The MOU on Transition Planning states that: "It is the intent of the participating agencies to provide staff attendance at individual transition planning meetings when appropriate. For purposes of initial implementation of this memorandum however, participation by participating agencies may be limited based on local resources and may include one or more of the following: (A) local interagency planning groups and agreements for transition implementation; (B) information packets on local services (or audiovisual presentations); (C) workshop/parent meetings to disseminate information; (D) face-to-face meetings regarding students being jointly served at the time of individual transition plan development; (E) parent-to-parent training sessions regarding adult services; (F) information provided at varying times to accommodate families who can not attend scheduled meetings; (G) staff attendance at the individual transition planning meetings and subsequent reviews; and (H) acceptance of referrals for consideration of services."
The involvement of social service agencies in the transition planning process is manifested in a wide range of activities on the part of both the school and the agencies. Activities undertaken by school staff included:

- Personal visits by school staff to each of the agencies with the purpose of identifying appropriate agency staff and establishing contacts.
- Invitation of agency staff to ITP meetings.
- Involvement of agency representatives in a variety of school activities.
- Involvement of agencies in training parents in transition planning services and in agency services.
- Development of an agency directory for parents, listing the different services, agencies and contacts within each agency rather than just titles and telephone numbers.
- Organization of parent and student visits to agencies.

However, in spite of this range of activities, the relationship with service agencies is regarded by both school staff and parents as a component in the transition planning process which requires considerably more effort. This perception is based on several reasons:

- School staff are not knowledgeable of agencies, agency services, and how to access them.
- Parents used to the school's mode of service provision (where parents have to take little initiative to obtain services) are frequently overwhelmed, confused, intimidated and ineffective in contacting agencies and accessing services. Contacting and accessing agency services constitutes a new type of experience for parents.
- School staff refer to agency representatives who do <u>not</u> come to ITP meetings because of staff shortages, or limit their attendance to ITP meetings involving students about to graduate, as "the invisible component" in the transition planning process.

The study demonstrated a range of activities on the part of both schools and agencies faced with transition planning. The need to establish close and viable contacts with representatives of key service agencies is regarded as critical by school staff. In the interviews conducted, school staff emphasized, among all other school-agency activities, the value of **personal, face-to-face** contacts between school staff and agency staff. The importance of such contact was manifested in a recommendation to assign a school staff member to the exclusive position of being an agency liaison.

Success Factors: In this study, school staff and parents repeatedly identified several success factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the transition planning process and the development of the ITP. These success factors were:

- Building a cohesive team where the student, parent, teacher, employer, school administration and service providers are

committed to the tasks of transition planning.

- Staff, student and parent training in transition planning.
- Staff who are knowledgeable of transition planning and post high school outcomes.
- Thorough student and parent preparation for the meeting.
- Active student participation: The ITP is successful if it is student driven. It is important for the students to know what they would like to do, to articulate their wishes, and to indicate what they do not want or do not like to do.
- Parental involvement and support.
- Continuous refinement of the ITP from the age of 16 until the student graduates.
- Personal, face-to-face contact between service agencies and the student and his/her family before the student leaves high school.
- ITP follow-through: Coordination of the ITP with the IEP.
- Establishment of community-based educational training/work sites.

Barriers to Effective Transition Planning: Several types of barriers were identified; these include:

- Poorly informed and trained staff.
- Lack of involvement on the part of the student, parents, and service agencies.
- Lack of communication among parents, students, school staff, agency representatives, and employers.
- Unrealistic expectations (too low or high) or lack of expectations on the part of parents or teachers.
- Unsuccessful employment experiences on the part of students.
- Lack of a follow-through plan.
- Lack of business and community awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities.
- Limited opportunities in the community for individuals with disabilities.
- Lack of programs in the community for individuals with severe and multiple disabilities.

Value of Transition Planning: The value of transition planning is unquestioned. Creating and raising parent and student awareness of the future, training the student to become a productive member of society following the student's exit from high school, and developing a framework to enable the student to lead a "full life" are some of the values associated with transition planning. These values were eloquently expressed in the following testimonials by a teacher and a parent.

> "The ITP is a process that has been needed for a long time. You got to connect the student with the community, connect the student with life after school. This is one of the ways in which we can do it...The more we go into it in a structured manner the more the parents and the student ultimately gain. The thought process behind it is important; for years we trained the student to function in the community and then school ended and they sat at home and watched television. The parents were not trained and did not know how to access services. They thought that the agencies will provide services like the schools did. There was a real breakdown in communications. The students' lives did not have much quality in them. The ITP assures that the quality services that they receive in school continues after they leave school. It has given them skills that are competitive. Our kids are not self confident. They hesitate in stepping out. This has given them a better chance to succeed. Before, students were just put aside; now they are given opportunities to be independent; other people are seeing that they are capable of during something and supporting themselves."

> "Expectations are the key words... If you don't really believe that your child can do any better, then he won't. The expectations did not

seem very realistic to me when I first heard them, but they sure were achievable, and they were met. I went to see him at work. They had those expectations, they demanded them out of him, and then they got them. It was unbelievable. They have changed my expectations. My hopes and dreams for him are that he would be able to live somewhat independently, to be able to meet his own basic needs, that he would have his own network of friends and extended family to support him. That he would have a recreational activity that would mean a lot to him like running or jogging or swimming, and that he would be employed full-time in a meaningful position. They set those expectations. Those were my dreams and they set them as realistic expectations. I can't say enough about it. The teachers had to really go out on a limb to make this happen. Even though philosophically, people would tell you to have high expectations, expect the best, reality is that expectations don't always come true. But it happened here."

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Student, Parent, School Staff Training. Transition planning is a new process for families and schools. Families still are not fully aware of the process and how it differs from the IEP. In fact, many do not differentiate between transition planning and other processes, meetings, and services undertaken or provided by the school. School personnel vary in their knowledge and application of transition. Generally, both students and families have little knowledge of adult services and employment. Many participants in this study had a limited concept of transition and of the vision outlined in IDEA and the MOU on Transition Planning. Also, in this study, most of the districts' school staff, parents, and students received little training in transition planning and how to turn planning into outcomes. More training needs to be available and more people need to access it.

Training of school personnel, parents and students should address the following components:

- The purpose of transition planning; that is, planning for adult life in the community and planning for an integrated life for all students with disabilities.

- Student empowerment: training students to make choices and drive their future planning process.

- Information about the transition planning process itself, including: ITP development, identification of resources in the community, and the specification of changes in the curriculum to support successful transition.

- Delineation of desirable adult outcomes for students with disabilities.

- The need to look at the full spectrum of an individual's life. Transition planning and services seem to be focused predominantly on vocational training, with other equally important areas, being given less attention.

- In this study, it appears that the issue of guardianship is not being raised by either the parents or the school districts. Parents need to know the issues surrounding guardianship and service delivery before they try to access the adult service provider system.

- Information about guardianship needs to be presented to the parent at the time of the first transition planning meeting so that any arrangements that may be needed can be completed before the student reaches the age of 18. School districts also need to take responsibility to see that their own staffs are knowledgeable about guardianship requirements.

Greater Involvement of Students in Transition Planning. School district personnel, parents and students need training on how to enable the student to become an active participant in the planning process and how to make the process student driven.

Development of Strategies to Compensate for Lack of Parental Involvement. Parental involvement emerged (in the case studies and in interviews with school personnel) as the most important contributor to the success of students and transition

planning. Lack of parental involvement was cited repeatedly as a barrier to effective transition planning. Schools must develop an array of strategies to increase parental involvement or to compensate for the lack of it. Strategies may include:

- Empowerment of the students to advocate on their own behalf.
- Providing adequate information and training to parents.
- Efforts to involve or re-involve families.
- Identification and involvement of surrogate families.
- Ensuring that students are linked into existing programs, such as: Big Brother/Big Sister, drop-out prevention, school-based peer support programs, school guidance counselor, ARC, UCP support program, etc.
- Collaborative partnership between parents and school personnel from the on-set of IEP development.
- Flexible scheduling of meetings to accommodate parents' availability.

Greater Attention to Recreation and Leisure Activities. The students in this sample, especially those with more severe disabilities, seem to have limited participation in recreation or leisure activities with persons who do not have disabilities. Recreational opportunities for most seemed limited to Special Olympics and other segregated programs. The recreation/leisure component of transition planning does not seem to be given much attention. Districts and parents both need more information on the importance of this aspect of transition planning, including information on the impact of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on their opportunities to access recreational facilities and programs in their schools and communities.

Increased Emphasis on Development of Social Networks. The students in this study, especially those with severe disabilities, seemed to have few friends, little contact with school mates outside of school, and few social networks outside of their families. Not all of the supports these individuals will need as adults can possibly be met by agencies or families; they will also need friends. This isolation is likely to have a negative impact on their future ability to live and work in their communities. The development of a social network seems to be one area getting little attention during the transition planning process.

Moving from Paper Compliance to Outcome-Based Planning. Outcome-based planning requires that the objectives and outcomes specified in the ITP be integrated into the student's IEP. Teachers need examples about how to use transition planning to transform ideals and visions into concrete curriculum activities.

Allocation of School Funding to Support Transition Planning and Services. Schools that funded and dedicated resources to transition planning and services had more successful programs than schools that did not allocate resources for transition. School districts should develop a transition program component that fits their needs and strengths. Schools also need to dedicate a full-time transition coordinator or trained vocational adjustment coordinator to transition planning rather than assign the transition planning task as an additional responsibility to other school staff.

Need for Schools to Build Connections with Local Communities and Develop an Array of Options for Community Participation. The school leads the transition planning process. To be successful school personnel must become increasingly connected to their communities by establishing stronger linkages with industries, businesses and generic service providers. Schools need to increase outcome-based transition planning around community living, including work, adult education, and specialized and generic adult service programs. School personnel and parents need to recognize that linkages with adult service providers can be established in a variety of ways, not just through participation in ITP meetings but also through information dissemination, responding to referrals, and communicating with employers.

For a copy of the comprehensive case studies report, please contact Ron DiOrio in the Division of Policy Planning and Evaluation, Texas Education Agency, at (512) 463-9701.

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;

(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a non-segregated basis;

(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;

(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;

(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and

(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 AS AMENDED; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; TITLE IX, EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED; AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990; AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1991.

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